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V.—GOETHE'S QUATRAIN "LIEGT DIR GESTERN
KLAR UND OFFEN" A PARAPHRASE
FROM MAUCROIX.

Few lines by Goethe are better known than the quatrain

Liegt dir Gestern klar und offen,
Wirkst du heute kräftig frei,
Kannst auch auf ein Morgen hoffen,
Das nicht minder glücklich sei.,

and it seems to have been a special favorite with Goethe himself. The verses were originally published in lithographed facsimile of the poet's manuscript, dated Nov. 7, 1825 (date of celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of Goethe's coming to Weimar), under Bendixen's lithograph after Vogel von Vogelstein's portrait of Goethe,¹ and Goethe selected them to close Group IV of the *Zahme Xenien* in his final edition of his Works.² Not only did Goethe present various autograph transcripts to friends, but being, as is well known, much interested in the then new process of lithography,³ he even had lithographic facsimiles made, reading as follows:

Liegt dir *Gestern* klar und offen,
Wirkst du *Heute* kräftig treu;
Kannst auch auf ein Morgen hoffen,
Das nicht minder glücklich sey.

Johannis 1830.

J. W. Goethe.

and then sent one of these to his friend F. F. H. Küstner,

¹ Hamburg, 1826; cf. Bendixen's letter to Goethe, Dec. 6, 1825, and Goethe's reply, Dec. 19, in *Goethes Briefe* (Weimar ed.) XL, 419 and no. 161; also Hermann Rollett's *Die Goethe Bildnisse* (Vienna 1883), p. 196. The Weimar ed. (Werke III, 442) wrongly states that this portrait and facsimile appeared in *Goethes Goldener Jubeltag* (Weimar 1826); cf. Goethe-Jahrb. 1904 p. 254 and Gs Werke ed. Heine-mann II, 463.

² Ausgabe letzter Hand, IV, 337 (1827) of the 16mo issue; Weimar ed. III, 312.

³ I have a copy of Goethe's lithographic facsimile of the MS. of Byron's Dedication to him of *Sardanapalus*; cf. *Goethes Briefe* XXXVI, 208 and the editor's notes pp. 407-408.

consul-general for Saxe-Weimar in Leipzig, probably on Aug. 31, 1830, accompanied by other facsimiles including the lines:

Know'st thou *Yesterday*, its aim and reason,
Work'st thou well *Today* for worthy things,
Then calmly wait the *Morrows* hidden season,
And fear not thou what hap soe'er it brings.

June 1830.

J W v Goethe.

and

Chaque jour est un bien que du ciel je reçoi,
Profitons aujourd'hui de celui qu'il nous donne;
Il n'appartient pas plus aux jeunes gens qu'a moi,
Et celui de demain n'appartient a personne.

ce 24 juin 1830.

J. W. Goethe.

These two "versions" in English and French were accordingly printed, with the original and the letter to Küstner, by the elder von Biedermann, with the comment: "Die beiden Uebersetzungen sind wahrscheinlich auch von Goethe, doch lässt es sich nicht als gewiss behaupten."⁴ Later von Biedermann claimed that these English and French versions should have been duly included in the Hempel edition of Goethe's Werke, but von Loeper replied⁵ that he considered it most improbable that Goethe could have written them. Years later von Loeper found the French verses written in a note-book of Goethe's followed there by the name "Maucroux" (also in Goethe's handwriting), which he took to prove that some "Maucroux"

⁴ *Goethe und Leipzig*, 1865, II, 144. The three facsimiles mentioned passed into the possession of Rudolf Brockhaus, whose privately-printed posthumous Goethe-Festschrift "Zum 28. August 1899" includes a facsimile of his German MS. dated "1. Jan. 1830," and prints the English lines (*not* in facsimile), p. 63, more accurately than von Biedermann had done. My friend Mr. Wm. A. Speck, Curator of Classical German Literature in the Yale Univ. Library, has kindly lent me, from his wonderful collections, these two books, which I had not seen since 1912.

⁵ Hempel ed. V, 231 (1872): "Wenn auch des Englischen und noch mehr des Französischen wie wenige Deutsche kundig, war er doch nicht in dem eminenten Grade Meister beider Sprachen, um so nebenher auch in ihnen dichten zu können"; cf. similarly Strehlke's later and little-known ed. of *Goethes Gedichte* III, 504 (Werke III, Berlin, Ferd. Dümmler, undated but 1888; cf. G-Jahrb. 1889 p. 312) and also Düntzer's ed. (D. N. L.) III, 1, 231.

had written them, but he did not deny that they were translated from Goethe. Describing this note-book at length, von Loeper says (G-Jahrb. 1890, p. 141): ‘. . . französische Excerpte des Jahres 1828 . . . Darunter auch die Strophe, welche man wohl Goethe selbst als Uebersetzung von: “Liegt dir Gestern klar und offen” zugeschrieben hat, mit Angabe des Dichters: *Maucroux*.’ Von L. then prints the lines as above, except: *reçois*. He himself had previously (1872) called the French lines “die französische Uebersetzung.” Even the late Prof. Carl Schüddekopf and Prof. H. G. Gräf, both editors of the Weimar edition of Goethe and most careful and competent authorities in such matters, expressly refer to the 1890 passage just quoted, and still consider the lines by “Maucroux” or “Maucroix” as a mere “Uebersetzung oder Paraphrase.”⁶

Some seventeen years ago I found that the English version quoted above was taken by Goethe from the beginning of Carlyle’s essay “Signs of the Times” as it appeared anonymously in the *Edinburgh Review* for June 1829.⁷

Thus the matter of these two English and French verses was generally considered as finally settled, except that there may have been some slight curiosity as to the personality of this “Maucroux” and the circumstances of his translating Goethe’s lines into French.

However, several years ago bibliographical curiosity led me to examine Louis Paris’s edition of the *Oeuvres Diverses* (Paris 1854, 2 vols.) of François de Maucroix (1619-1708), the friend of La Fontaine, and then of course I found at once that the so-called translation from Goethe was in fact written by Maucroix half a century before Goethe was born. Though a Canon of the Cathedral of Reims, Maucroix is more appropriately described, by Sainte-Beuve, as “un disciple d’Horace”; for the publication of the *Historiettes* of his friend and confidant Tallemant des Réaux unexpectedly showed him to have been far

⁶ Cf. Schüddekopf in *Gs Briefe* L, 188 (Weimar 1912), and Gräf’s most conscientious and elaborate standard work *Goethe über seine Dichtungen* IX, 791, 800 and index (Frankfurt 1914).

⁷ Cf. G-Jb. 1904, p. 236 and Corresp. betw. G. and Carlyle, p. 118, and *Athenaeum* (London) Aug. 10, 1912, p. 142. C. altered the text when reprinting the essay. Cf. C.’s letter, Nov. 23, 1869, to Sir Chas. Murray (*Memoir of M. by Sir Herbert Maxwell*, 1898, p. 76).

more human and less ascetic than had been supposed for two centuries.⁸

According to the *Nouvelle Biographie Générale* (as late as 1861), Maucroix wrote our quatrain at the age of 89, but probably this is merely an unconscious and illogical deduction from the fact that at the time of writing these lines he was over 80 and the further fact that he died at 89. Paris's standard text reads as follows:⁹

LV.

Quatrain

fait à l'âge de plus de 80 ans.

1700.

Chaque jour est un bien du ciel que je reçois,
Je jouis aujourd'hui de celui qu'il me donne;
Il n'appartient pas plus aux jeunes gens qu'à moi,
Et celui de demain n'appartient à personne.

Paris adds the following foot-note: "Ce quatrain nous a été conservé par Voltaire, qui le cite dans son *Siècle de Louis XIV*, à l'article de Maucroix. On l'a réimprimé à tort comme inédit dans l'*Almanach des Muses de 1775*, p. 68." But the *Almanach* did not in fact claim that the verses were still unpublished.¹⁰

Most probably Goethe read the quatrain in the alphabetical list of Writers, &c. in Voltaire's *Siècle de Louis XIV*, though it is not now possible to ascertain just when he first and last read them there, since his references to Voltaire are literally legion. The passage in Voltaire¹¹ is brief:

⁸ *Historiettes de Tallemant des Réaux* 3rd ed. VII, 200-211 (Paris 1858) and *passim*.

⁹ *Oeuvres Diverses de Fr. de Maucroix* (Paris 1854) I, 216; cf. I, ccxxii. Sainte-Beuve's review is in *Causeries* X (also in Saintsbury's selection from the *Causeries*, Oxford 1894); he had quoted the quatrain once before in V (from Sieyès). The quatrain is also in *Nouvelle Biographie Générale* XXXIV, 343 (1861) and in Larousse's *Grand Dict. Univers.* X, 1354; also in Ramage's *Beautiful Thoughts from French and Italian Authors*, Liverpool 1875 (and possibly in 1st ed. 1866).

¹⁰ *Almanach des Muses*, 1775, Paris, p. 68: "Vers / Faits à l'âge de quatre-vingt ans. / Chaque jour est un bien que du Ciel je reçois; / je jouis aujourd'hui de celui qu'il me donne: / il n'appartient pas plus aux jeunes-gens qu'à moi, / & celui de demain n'appartient à personne. / Par feu l'Abbé de Maucroix./"

¹¹ *Oeuvres*, Kehl ed. 1785, vol. 20 of the 8vo issue, vol. 22, 12mo; cf. ed. Beuchot XIX, 157, ed. Moland XIV, 102, also e. g. XIX, 141 (1821). These verses do not yet appear in the note on Maucroix in

"*Maucroix*, (François) Né à Noyon, en 1619, historien, poëte, et littérateur. On a retenu quelques-uns de ses vers, tels que ceux-ci, qu'il fit à l'âge de plus de 80 ans:

Chaque jour est un bien que du Ciel je reçois;
 Jouissons aujourd'hui de celui qu'il nous donne.
 Il n'appartient pas plus aux jeunes gens qu'à moi;
 Et celui de demain n'appartient à personne.

Mort en 1708."

Thus it is at last clear that the French lines, which even the very best and latest authorities on Goethe still continue to treat as evidently a mere translation, are in reality the *original*, of which Goethe's well-known and oft-quoted quatrain turns out to be after all only a masterly paraphrase.

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the 1763 ed. of Voltaire (Essay sur L'Hist. Univ. ch. XLI) but they may have been added in 1769 or 1775.

Possibly Maucroix's lines in question are included also in "Nouvelles Oeuvres Diverses de J. de La Fontaine et Poésies de F. de Maucroix, accompagnées d'une vie de F. de Maucroix, de notes et d'éclaircissements, par C. A. Walckenaër, Paris, A. Nepveu, 1820," 8vo, pp. xvi, 335, 2 leaves, cited in Comte de Rochambeau, Bibliographie des Oeuvres de La Fontaine, P. 1911, p. 627 (and Bibliographie de la France, Nov. 11, 1820, no. 4012). I have not yet seen this volume.

Perhaps Goethe wrote Maucroix's lines in his note-book (?1828!) from memory—which would explain: "Maucroux" and "Profitons." An undated memorandum addressed to his daughter-in-law, printed in 1912 (Gs Briefe L, 113) reads: [An Ottilie] "Mit Bitte um die ersten Zeilen / Il n'appartient pas plus aux jeunes qu'à moi, / Et celui de demain n'appartient à personne." For the copy of Maucroix's lines which Goethe handed to Quetelet in 1829, see Gs Gespräche, Gesamtausgabe, IV, 160 (Leipzig 1910) or Q.'s Sciences, &c. 1866.

In connection with the above instance of "Original und Nachbildung," I may add here that I have at last succeeded in identifying the original of Goethe's poem "Hochländisch," hitherto often sought in vain. A full account of this will appear later.